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DE RUEHNE #0982/01 1341436  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 141436Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6583  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7662  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3407  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 6375  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1742  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1344  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 8023  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 8307  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000982

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR OPS, P (WEST), SCA (BOUCHER), NSC FOR CAMP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: BHARAT BALLOT 09: INDIAN EXIT POLLS: NO CLEAR  
WINNER, AWAITING OFFICIAL RESULTS

REF: A. NEW DELHI 604

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 969

[1](#)1. (U) Polling in India's month-long election to choose a new parliament and form a new government ended at 5:00 pm on May 13. Immediately afterward, the hyperactive Indian electronic media began to furiously air exit polls that compiled results from all five phases of voting. TV coverage continued late into the night on all the news channels. The explosion of exit poll coverage at 5:01 pm occurred because the media had been prohibited by the Election Commission from releasing exit poll information until voting had been completed on grounds that such polls could be manipulated to influence voting in subsequent rounds.

The Problem with Exit Polls

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[1](#)2. (SBU) The Embassy has no way of assessing the accuracy of the myriad of varying exits polls that were released on May [1](#)13. We strongly caution readers, however, about the value of exit polls in India because of their long and proven record of being unreliable and misleading. While the most spectacular example of the treachery of Indian polls was in 2004 when every single opinion and exit polls called the election in favor of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coalition, there are many other examples of inaccurate poll results during the last 15 years.

[1](#)3. (SBU) There are many reasons why Indian opinion polls and exit polls tend to be suspect (Ref A). The ailments range from political bias of polling agencies and media outlets, the operational challenges related to assessing the preferences of India's huge (714 million) electorate, the preponderance of local issues and parties, and the country's vast caste, religious, ethnic and geographic diversity. Lack of adequate technology and poor infrastructure make polling an immensely labor intensive, expensive and often dubious process.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Barun Mitra of the Liberty Institute told us that all exit/opinion polls "should be ignored" because they have consistently proven inaccurate. He faulted the electronic

media for seeing the exit polls solely as a marketing tool to attract record viewership on polling day. He said that the companies conducting the polls and their media sponsors seldom reveal the methodology and frameworks used and never discuss the reason why they were wrong. They simply move on to the next electoral event. Mitra identified several anomalies in some of the polls -- one showing a massive swing in vote share towards the Congress Party/Nationalist Congress Party in Maharashtra, another showing the Congress Party retaining its 29 seats in parliament while suffering from a significant drop in vote share. He said neither the polling companies nor the sponsors provide any information that can serve as a basis for explaining these variations.

#### Strong Caution: The Polling Numbers

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¶15. (U) Keeping in mind these warnings, the following are the results of some of the most widely aired exit polls:

-- CNN-IBN: Congress, 145-160 seats; BJP, 135-150 seats; Third Front, 110-130 seats  
-- Star News: Congress Party, 157 seats; BJP, 154 seats; Third Front, 97 seats  
-- India TV: Congress Party, 152 seats; BJP, 143 seats; Third Front, 34 seats  
-- Zee News: Congress Party, 145 seats; BJP, 157 seats; Third Front, 109 seats  
-- Headlines Today: UPA, 191 seats; NDA, 180 seats; Third Front, 60 seats

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-- News X: UPA, 202 seats; NDA, 193 seats; Third Front, 101 seats

¶16. (U) There appears to be broad consensus on a few trends:

-- Bihar: BJP-ally JD(U) would perform well due to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's strong governance record. Former Congress allies Railways Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav and Steel and Chemicals/Fertilizers Minister Ram Vilas Paswan are expected to fare poorly.

-- Tamil Nadu: Jayalalithaa's AIADMK will perform well but there are significant differences in the polls as to how many seats she picks up.

-- Left Front: The communist parties will lose seats in West Bengal and Kerala.

-- Rajasthan: The Congress part will pick up 6-10 seats from a low base.

-- Uttar Pradesh: Chief Minister Mayawati unlikely to get the 45 plus seats she hoped for.

Post Reporting: Keep Your Eye on May 16

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¶17. (SBU) Embassy recommends that India watchers wait until votes are counted and results announced by the Election Commission on May 16. The results will begin to trickle in at 9:30 am that day. Barring a handful of races, we expect all the results to be announced by 5:00 pm. Embassy will closely follow the vote count on May 16. We expect to call the Ops Center about noon local time (1:30 am EST) with an interim report. We will transmit a cable by COB on May 16 (8:00 pm local time) with the complete results. Mission point of contact for all elections-related issues is Poloff Pushpinder Dhillon. He can be contacted via Embassy switchboard. The alternate is A/Pol Counselor Les Viguerie.

Comment: Tight Fight

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¶18. (SBU) Notwithstanding the widely varying exit polls, one

thing is clear to most political analysts we talk to: the election is a close race between the Congress Party and the BJP to see which emerges as the single largest party. This is a distinct change from the situation two months ago at the start of the campaign when the Congress Party was favored to easily win the most seats. Analysts attribute the perceived slippage in Congress fortunes to strategic misjudgments in some of its pre-poll alliance discussions, the lack of an adequate ground game in some areas, and unwise selection of some candidates.

19. (SBU) Even before the polls had closed on May 13, the election cycle had moved on to the next stage -- the political parties had already begun negotiating, positioning, bargaining, horse-trading, bribing and deal-making to see who can muster up the magic number of 272 seats needed to form the next coalition government in India. Unless one of the two national parties springs a big surprise on May 16 by unexpectedly soaring or sinking, the following two weeks promise an exciting political drama with unexpected turns and strange bedfellows as parties vie for a piece of power in Delhi.

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